

## BOOK REVIEW

JOSEPH EWAN AND NESTA DUNN EWAN. 2007. **Benjamin Smith Barton, Naturalist and Physician in Jeffersonian America.** (ISBN 978-1-930-72335-1, hbk.). Missouri Botanical Garden Press, P.O. Box 299, St. Louis, Missouri 63166-0299, U.S.A. (**Orders:** [www.mbgpress.org](http://www.mbgpress.org)). \$39.99, xxvi + 1127 pp., 95 b&w illustrations, 7¼" × 10¼".

"...Ages and generations must, sometimes, pass away before a Science can rear its head into system:—even the life of man is, not unfrequently, too limited for the discovery of one solitary, important fact. So immense;—so infinite, is Nature, so little is man..."

So wrote young Benjamin Smith Barton (1766–1815), a dedicated physician, lecturer, and teacher who helped further medical science in the New World. However, as the above quote suggests, his first love was that of the natural sciences, and his devotion to that science makes him instrumental in the development of American natural history and best known as the first professional naturalist in the newly formed United States of America.

Sadly, dying in his forties, he fell short of reaching all that he wished to accomplish. Even so, the list of his accomplishments is extensive. He authored the first textbook on botany written in the United States, *Elements of Botany*, as well as numerous other publications, including *Collections for an Essay Towards a Materia Medica of the United States*, and *New Views of the Origin of the Tribes and Nations of America*. From 1804–1809, he served as editor of the *Philadelphia Medical and Physical Journal*, one of the oldest scientific publications of the United States. He instructed Meriwether Lewis in plant identification and collection to assist with the gathering of plant specimens during Lewis and Clark's Corps of Discovery expedition (1804–1806).

Underpinned throughout the early botanical history of America can be found the influence of Benjamin Smith Barton: he preserved many of the observations of American botanists, like those of William Bartram, whose best-selling *Travels* (1791) strongly influenced English Romanticism; on Barton's western trip in 1785, researching his incomplete *Flora of North America*, Barton (out of his own pocket) supported the assistance of two botanists, Fredrick Pursh and Thomas Nuttall, who would go on to attain greater fame in the field than Barton. Notables such as Baldwin, Darlington, Ives, Horsfield, and John Richardson Young, for example, attest to his inspiration. "He was a veritable squirrel in the woods of natural history, collecting, planting, leaving nuts for others to carry off," say authors Joseph and Nesta Ewan.

Barton's wide-ranging interests brought forth vast amounts of correspondence with contemporaries including Thomas Jefferson, Alexander von Humboldt, and Thomas Pennant. These correspondences with Barton provide pivotal insights into the development of early natural sciences in the United States.

Authors Joseph Ewan (1909–1999) and his wife, Nesta Dunn Ewan (1908–2000), were considered two of the leading historians of American botany, and their decades of research into this book is a masterpiece. Laced with interesting insights and interweaving links, this book will open a wealth of archival resources to the researcher.

The authors (at the end of their introduction) leave us with this quote by G.M. Trevelyan: "The poetry of history does not consist of imagination roaming at large, but of imagination pursuing the fact and fastening upon it. ...The dead were and are not. Their place knows them no more and is ours today. Yet they were once as real as we, and we shall tomorrow be shadows like them."—Linny Heagy, *Linny/Designer, Illustrator, email: a0005835@airmail.net*